Managing the city's forests

Discussion on tree types, invasive species

By KYLE JARVIS
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At a forum hosted by Claremont Parks and Recreation, the department of planning and development, and the Claremont University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension Thursday night, residents and local officials voiced their opinions on the management of Claremont's forests.

Laura French, of The Ecosystem Management Company, the consulting firm hired by the city to analyze its forests, gave an overview of the 1,400 acres of forestland on 10 separate tracts, discussing various characteristics of each and how they relate to the information her company gathered during its evaluation.

"One of the main concerns is the amount of invasive species," she said. "Honeysuckle, burning bush, and others introduced species of shrubs are spread around because birds love the berries they produce. They take over and out-compete the native species, so that's a real concern."

French remarked at the abundance of "some of the biggest white pine and hemlock you'll find in this area" around the Arrowhead lot. "At the height of land, there's a lot of red oak and pine."

At Moody Park, she talked about the need to thin the red pine, as well as the possibility of expanding the open space near the top where the roofed picnic areas are. When she

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spoke of the Winter Street/Veterans Park lots, she talked about the abundance of "beautiful wetlands," as well as the signs of white pine regeneration. "As a forester that's really exciting to see," she said. "It's a good sign."

The Rice Reservoir was characterized as having lots of dense white pine, much of which had been blown over by recent wind storms. The Whitewater Reservoir, partially located in Cornish, got attention from French for its "dense hemlock, dry red oak, substantial trail network, and significant wildlife."

French said the wildlife in that area includes beaver, moose, and bear, all of which she saw or recorded signs of.

Following French's presentation, Karen Bennett of the UNH Cooperative Extension facilitated an open discussion about what residents would like to see in relation to all of or just a specific area.

One theme that came up repeatedly was the need for a sustainable, selective, timber harvesting program.

"There's a lot of nice timber in some of these areas," said Assistant Mayor Andy Austin. "I'd like to see us log some of that and maybe make benches for seating along the ski lift to enhance that area."

Arrowhead volunteer Tom Burnham agreed, saying "there are some really huge trees out there. It really needs to be forested, selectively. And our group would certainly be able to monitor that."

The issue of motorized recreation came up more than once, too, specifically the need to police it.

"The snowmobiles and the ATV's should police themselves," said Ward II resident Bob DeCook. "I get upset when I see they've come through and the tracks are all over some of those wetlands. I don't want to see those areas abused."

Paul Lafreniere of French Terrace said he's concerned about the summertime partying that takes place in the Winter Street forest area.

"They come walking down afterward," he said. "A few dozen at a time, at midnight or 1 a.m., and they've all been in the sauce. It's the only lot that's in the city, a five minute walk from downtown. I'd like to see some way we can police that."

Director of planning and economic development Al Britton closed the forum with assurances that a follow-up session will happen soon, and will most likely include a field gathering, so people can actually see the areas in person.

There is a survey available at city hall and the Visitor's Center where residents can indicate which issues are most important to them in relation to which forestlands. Surveys are due by May 16. For more information please call the department of planning and development at 542-7008.

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